Big XII Repeat? • Big Dance Diary • NU's Top Lefty

# NEBRASKA SPORTS America

A punter you say?
Why Dan Hadenfeldt's bonus year may catapult NU to #1

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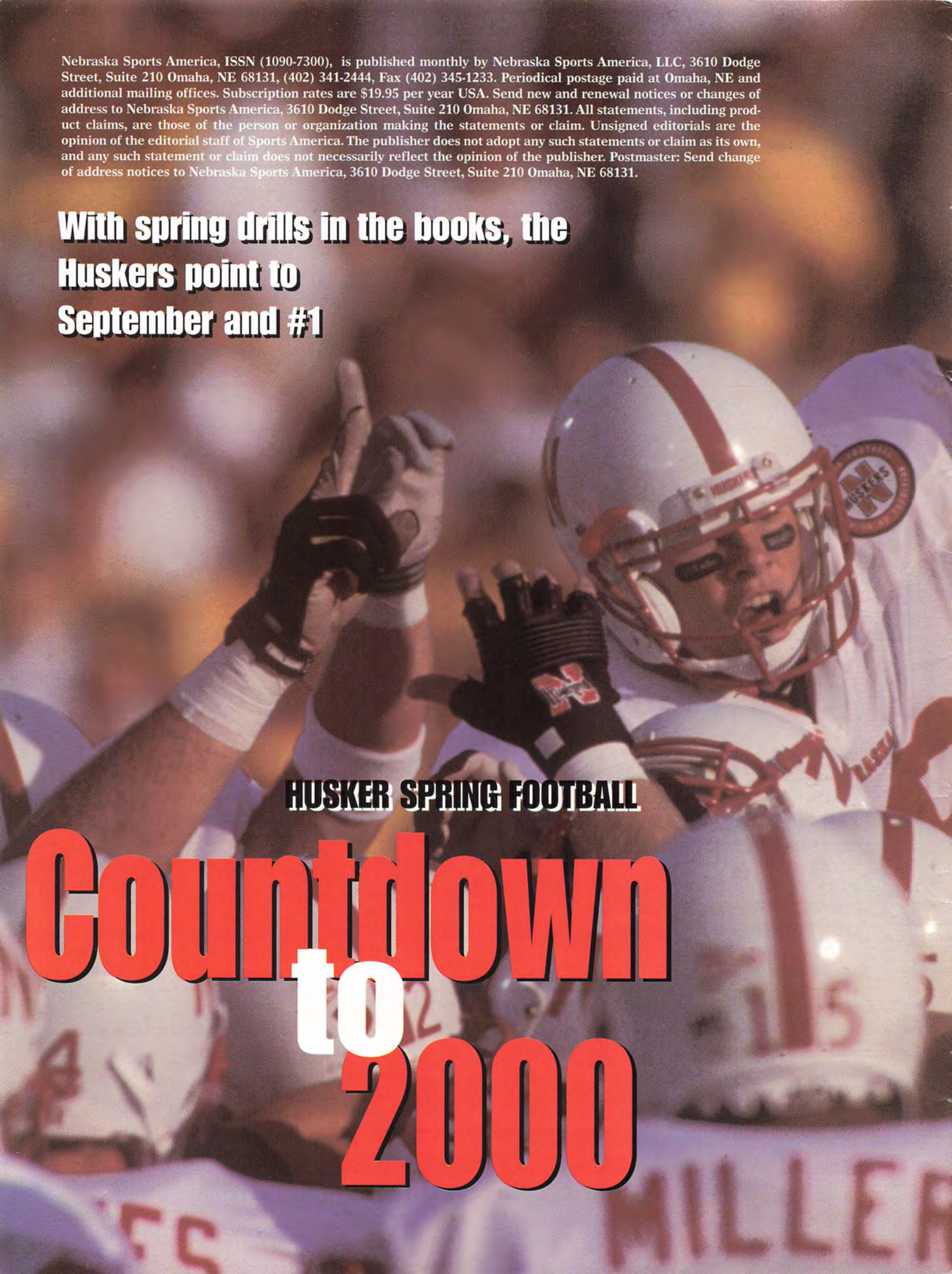
## With spring drills in the books, the Huskers point to September and #1



### HUSKER SPRING FOOTBALL

# Countdown to 2000

NEBRASKA SPORTS America

May 2000 • Volume 7 • No. 5

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**On the Cover:** Sixth-year senior Dan Hadenfeldt booms a punt in the 2000 spring game; (inset) UNO hockey at the CCHA Fianl Four.
Photos by Eric Francis and Chris Machian.

# LETTER from the editor

Punters old and new, big and small, left-footed and right-footed, must be simply rejoicing across the land today as the May issue of Nebraska Sports America hits the streets with one of their brethren on the front cover.

Such statistics are not available- where is the Elias Sports Bureau when you need it?- but it has not been often in the annals of sports magazine publishing that a punter has graced the cover of an issue. Yet there in living color is Dan Hadenfeldt, the Huskers secret weapon in 2000, as we come out of spring practice and count down days to the September 2 visit to Lincoln by San Jose State.

Kris Brown made it on the cover of the December 1995 issue of the old Nebraska Sports magazine. That was at the end of his first year and the headline "Will this freshman decide if the Huskers repeat?" was in anticipation of a nail-biter at the 1996 Fiesta Bowl. Those of you who may have tuned in know that Brown was not a key figure in the game that night- a 38-point Nebraska triumph.

So is it safe to speculate that a punter may be the key element in Nebraska's run for a national championship this coming fall? With a standout quarterback, a stable of quality running backs and an offensive line with "Pipeline Jr." written all over it, who would think the punter will even play enough to earn a letter?

If the offense clicks like it could in 2000, Hadenfeldt may have trouble qualifying for the national statistics leaders based on too few kicks. Rest assured, though, when he is called on this fall, the sixth-year senior from Des Moines may raise the art of punting to its highest-level ever at Nebraska.

Also in this issue of NSA, come in out of the spring showers with us for a look at the new indoor football Omaha Beef and a profile of Lincoln Lightning star Damon Benning. We sent a notepad along with Creighton's Dan Kolder as the Jays played in the NCAA tourney and his "Big Dance Diary" awaits inside this month. Re-live UNO's magical hockey run through the CCHA playoffs and hit the field with boys' soccer standout and Athlete-of-the-Month Peter Billmeyer. And for those of you with a little bit of adventure in your soul, experience the heart-pounding, dry-mouthed adrenaline rush of paintball.

And although it's not quite the rush as being shot at with balls of paint, we are quite enthused about the work we're doing on some big issues for the months ahead. In June, it's College World Series time in Omaha and we'll bring you the best preview coverage of America's biggest collegiate sporting event. In July, we'll preview the upcoming Big XII Football season with in-depth information on every team and bonus coverage of the Huskers. As August rolls around, get ready for our colossal Football Annual which is the Huskers, the Mavs, the preps and more, plus we'll feature the Buy.Com Omaha Classic golf tournament. And then comes September...did I mention San Jose State already?

Paul Clark, General Manager


NEBRASKA SPORTS America

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ATHLETE of the month

# Westside's Billmeyer Directs Defense

Pete Billmeyer is unmistakably in charge when the Westside soccer team takes the field.

Partly because he's the goalie, the team's defensive leader. And partly because ... well, he's Pete Billmeyer.

"That's definitely part of me," Billmeyer said. "I have a voice that likes to carry."

"You should have heard his speech in the locker room before the game," Westside Coach Bruce Skinner said after an April shutout of a Metro Conference rival. "You'd have been fired up. Hey, I was fired up."

During play Billmeyer's deep-voiced chatter is constant. Directing, suggesting, encouraging, ordering. He's nonstop Xs and Os, making sure every member of the Warrior defense is in the right place at all times. And when the guys in front of him make a good play, there's lots of praise coming out of the net as well.

"That's one of the reasons I got my scholarship was for communication," Billmeyer said.

He's off to Oregon State next fall, following former Creighton assistant coach Dana Taylor into one of the toughest soccer conferences in the nation. Communication and brainwork are key to playing goalie, Billmeyer ex-plained. He estimates 80 percent of saves are ensured before a kick is even made, thanks to coordinated and well-played defense. "If I keep them organized out there and Coach keeps 'em organized, then I figure my job is pretty easy."

Skinner disagrees there. "You've got to be able to jump," the coach said. "You've got to be able to dive, sometimes while leaning the other way and the ball is curving in the air. You've got to do whatever you have to to get to that ball."

Billmeyer is an excellent, physically athletic goalie, as well as a leader, the coach said. One who made great strides to develop into an all-state, Division I prospect.

"He worked at it," the coach explained. "He kids me that I made him mad, and that's why he went after it so hard."

But it's his leadership and intelligence that sets Billmeyer apart as he pilots an aggressive, talented Westside team. With his omnipresent direction and grasp of the defense, he could become a coach. Heck, he already all but is a coach on the field.

"It's an absolute thinking game," he said. "It's 90 percent mental and 10 percent physical. Goalies...you always say they get better with age."

Most of the world's top position players tend to fade at around 28, Billmeyer said, while World Cup-level goalies can be the best they've ever been at the age of 35 because they know the game so well.

After the game, enthusiastic students climbed out of the stands, came all the way across the field to congratulate Billmeyer, slap him a high five. Pete Billmeyer is definitely getting better with age. v NSA

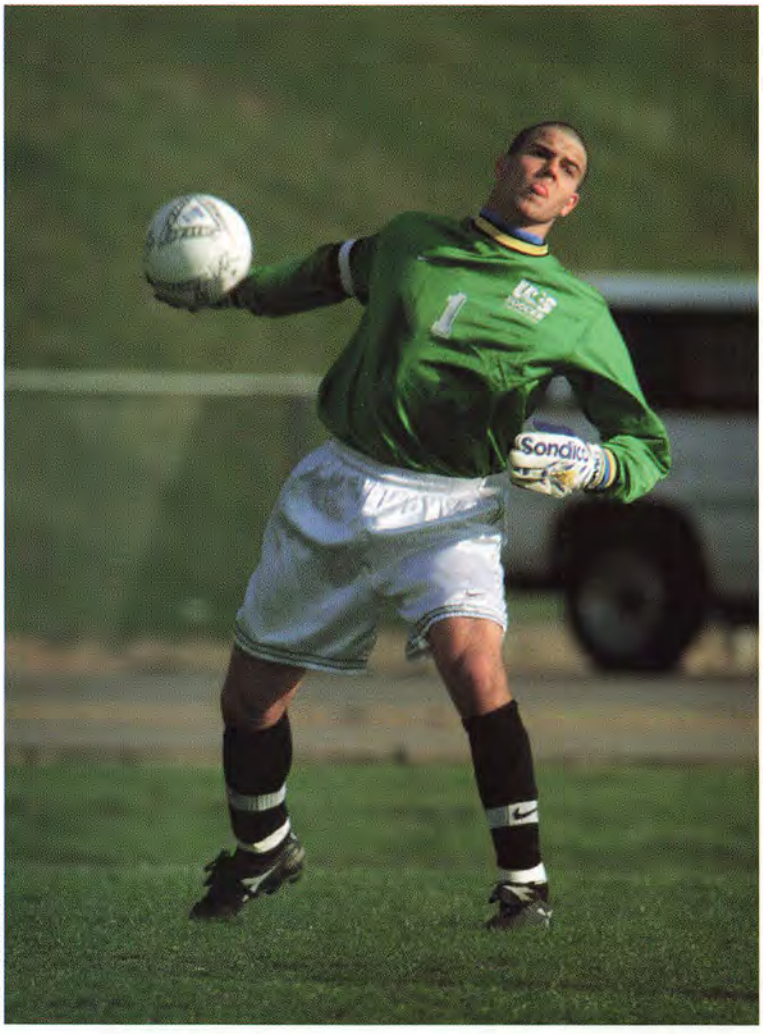

PHOTO BY ERIC FRANCIS

Westside's Pete Billmeyer will go west to Oregon State in the fall.

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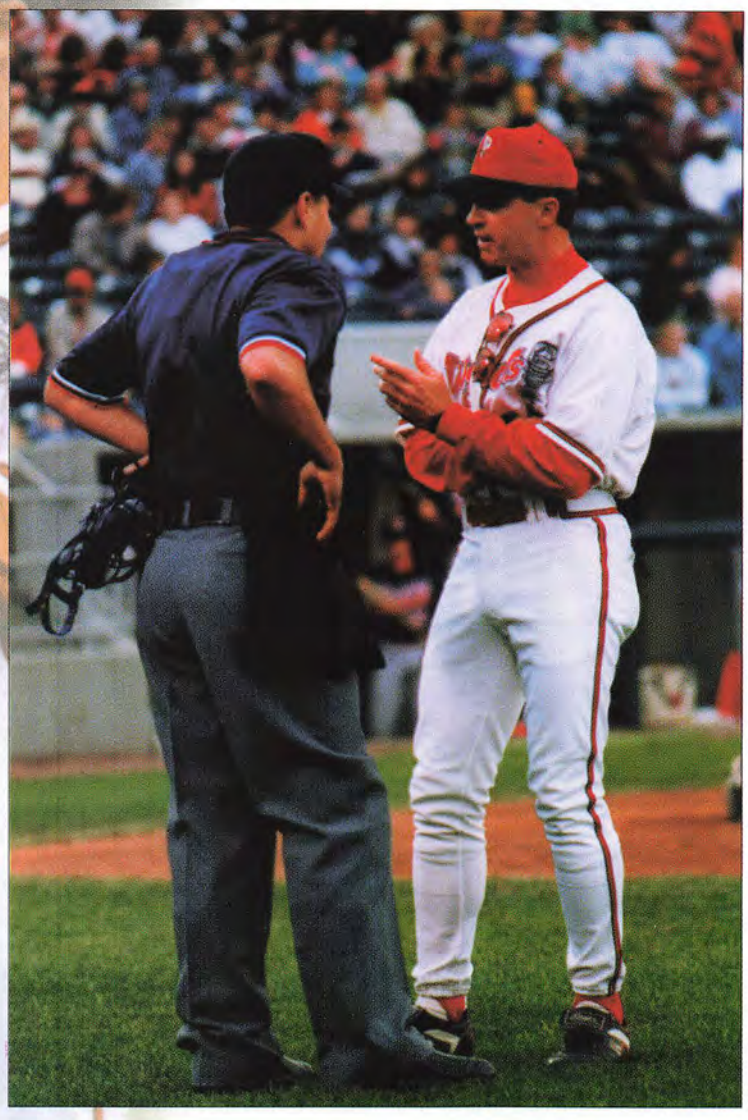

"We as believers (and athletes) should use challenges to see where we are in relation to where we want to be."

*Bob Herold*
*Baseball Coach*

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BETWEEN the Lines

BY JOHN KNICELY

# Charlie McBride's Brand New Ride

Charlie McBride used some interesting words when I spoke with him about his recent retirement from coaching Nebraska football. He referred to his new life as "miserable and screwy."

Those are hardly words you would expect from someone finally breaking away from 22 years of grinding to keep a national power on top.

But when you learn what the former Nebraska defensive coordinator has been doing since the Fiesta Bowl win over Tennessee, you'll understand.

Back then he talked about the problems with his back that made it difficult to stay on his feet for an entire game. What we didn't hear about is the fact his doctor was also concerned about Charlie's occasional irregular heartbeat and high blood pressure. It had been no big worry for Charlie who willfully tuned to headset garble on the sidelines while spurning advice from his doctor. But the persistent message to consider his future well-being finally connected at age 60.

In addition, surgery for carpal tunnel syndrome that preferably would have been performed yesterday is still unscheduled and his gimpy right knee will eventually be replaced when and if Charlie ever finds the time.

Indeed, time is the problem. Ever since McBride slipped into retirement, he's been too busy to rest. Now he's coaching other coaches.

Last month, instead of the old routine of spring practice at Nebraska, McBride was diagramming schemes on chalkboards and lighting up overheads at Arizona State, Minnesota, and Tennessee.

McBride is retired but not slowing down.

His jet-setting schedule did allow him several days in Lincoln to make repairs on his house before listing it with a realtor, but he then flew to Tallahassee for meetings with the coaching staff at Florida State.

All of this makes it sound like McBride has lost allegiance to NU and is busy sharing secrets with the enemy. The fact is coaches share openly with each other out of season, but those occasions are infrequent due to the incessant demands of their own programs.

Now Charlie is available.

His ties of course with Nebraska will never be broken. The top line on his consulting priority list is written in red. During spring ball, McBride was glad when he was around to assist new coach Jeff Jamrog in breaking down practice films.

So with that busy background in mind, Charlie's surprising choice of words in describing his retirement make more sense.

He may slow down in the future, but not before he hosts a golf tournament this summer designed to raise money for foster care. It's an issue close to the hearts of Charlie and his wife, Debbie. Along with their three sons, the McBrides opened their home to care for three foster children.

It would be nice to report that all three of those youngsters with troubled backgrounds later became productive citizens, but that's not the case. One returned to violence and eventually to prison, while another was simply too volatile to handle.

Success did follow the third foster child who became a standout football player and successful businessman before kidney failure ended his life prematurely.

The children of that man are now like grandchildren to the McBrides.

The man's son, who was named after his father, is showing great potential as a junior college running back. Through their involvement, the McBrides learned of the difficulty shared by many foster families who lack the resources necessary to provide opportunities that children in stable homes enjoy. The monthly stipend from the state for living expenses is not enough to cover the cost of extras such as school clubs, sports camps, musical instruments and braces.

Proceeds from McBride's golf tournament will assist those families and allow foster children the chance for those same opportunities.

When that commitment is finished, the real joy of retirement begins for Charlie McBride. He will spend time with his middle son fixing up the summer cabin in Fremont and while we're all cheering for the Big Red next fall McBride will be working construction in Arizona for a company owned and operated by his other two sons.

By then the words "miserable" and "screwy" should no longer apply. v NSA

*John Knicely is co-anchor at WOWT (Channel 6) in Omaha.*

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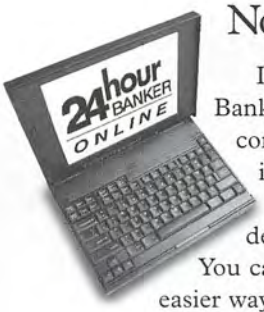


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| March 26 | Missouri | 1 pm |
| March 28 | Colorado St. | 5, 7 pm |
| March 29 | Colorado St. | 5, 7 pm |
| March 30 | Wichita St. | 6, 8 pm |
| April 8 | Baylor | 4:30 pm |
| April 9 | Baylor | 1 pm |
| April 11 | Missouri-KC | 4, 6 pm |
| April 18 | Iowa State | 4:30 pm |
| April 19 | Creighton | 7 pm |
| April 25 | Drake | 2, 4 pm |
| April 26 | Wisconsin | 1, 3 pm |
| April 29 | Texas | 5 pm |
| April 30 | Texas | 1 pm |
| May 5 | Kansas | 6, 8 pm |

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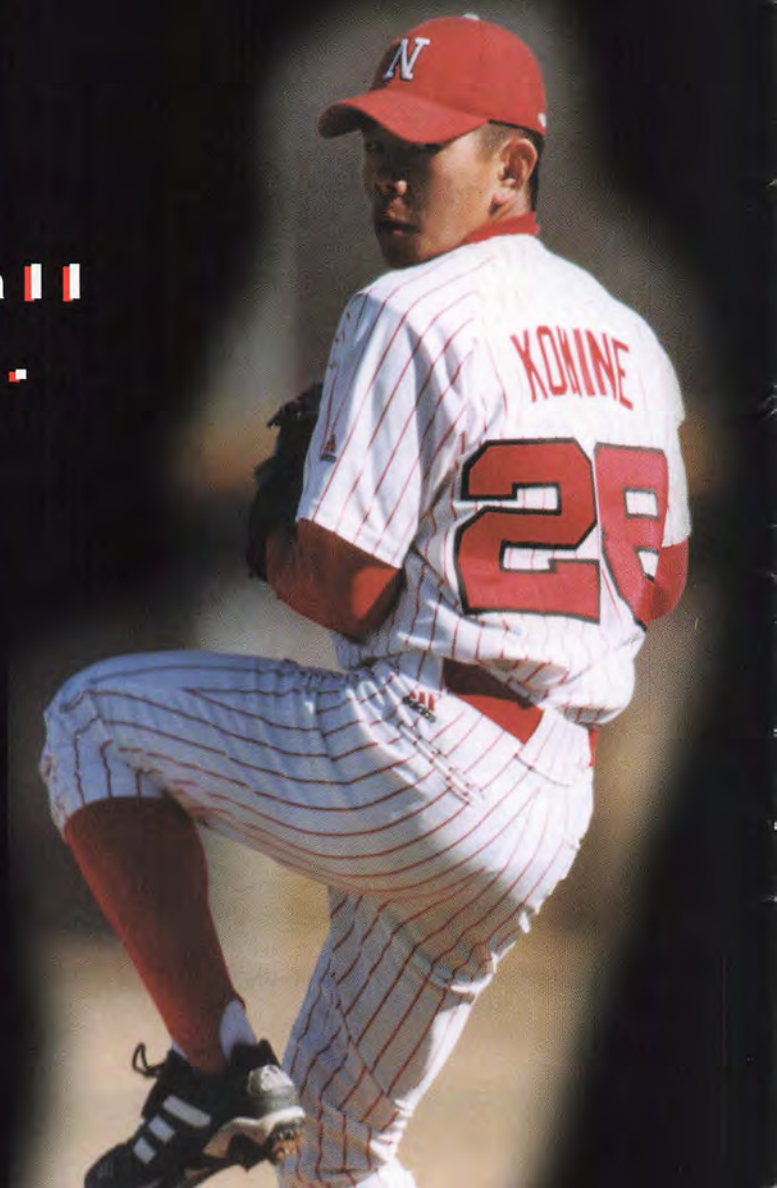
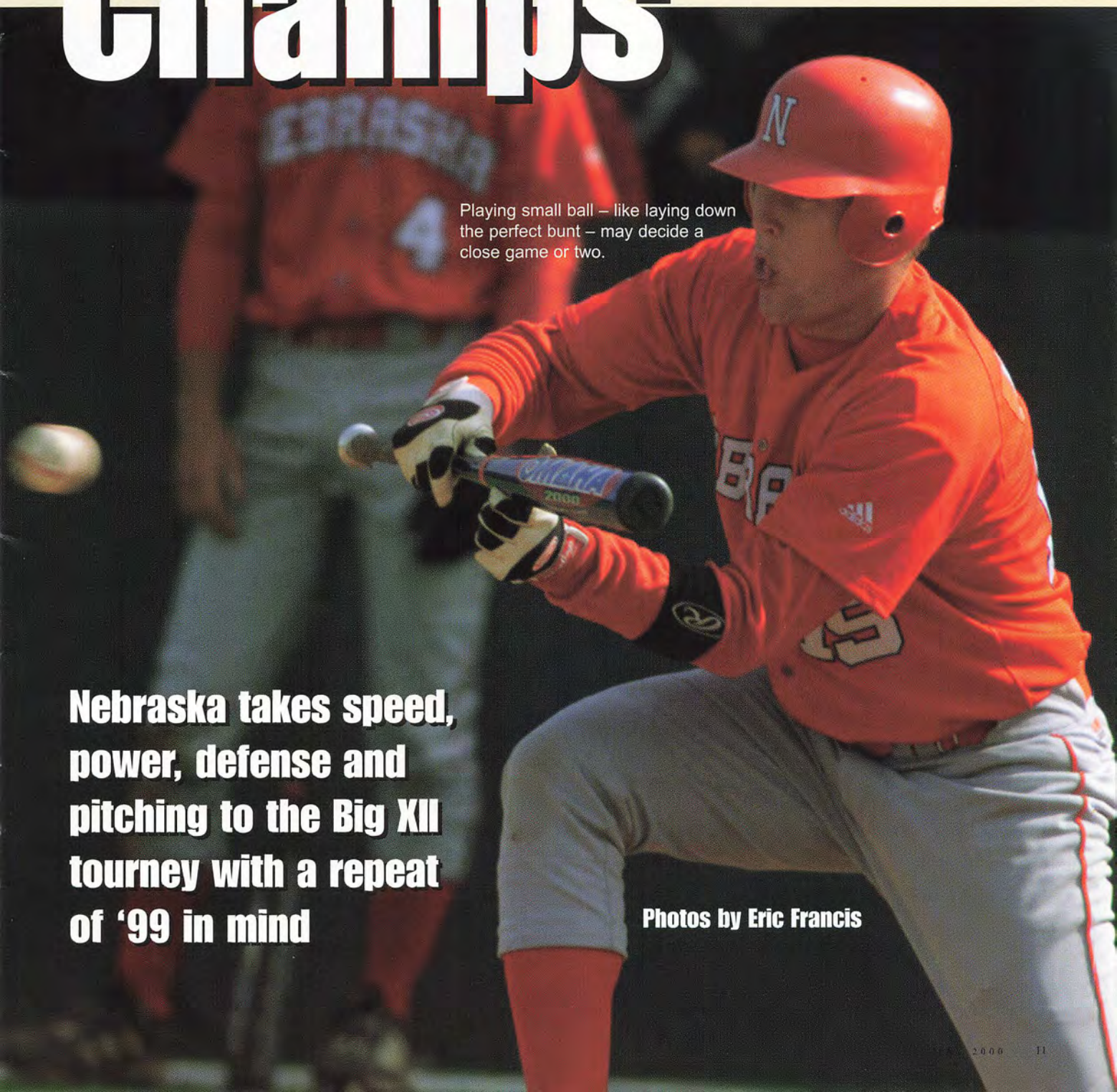



### baseball

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| March 7 | Nebraska-Omaha, 1-9 | 2 pm |
| March 17 | Oklahoma, 1-9 | 6:30 pm |
| March 18 | Oklahoma, 1-9 | 2 pm |
| March 19 | Oklahoma, 1-9 | 1 pm |
| March 24 | Texas Tech, 1-9 | 6:30 pm |
| March 25 | Texas Tech, 1-9 | 2 pm |
| March 26 | Texas Tech, 1-9 | 1 pm |
| March 28 | North Dakota St., 1-9 | 3 pm |
| April 4 | NW Missouri St., 1-9 | 6 pm |
| April 7 | Kansas, 1-9 | 6:30 pm |
| April 8 | Kansas, 1-9 | 2 pm |
| April 9 | Kansas, 1-9 | 1 pm |
| April 11 | Creighton, 1-9 | 6:30 pm |
| April 18 | Western Illinois, 1-9 | 7 pm |
| April 19 | Western Illinois, 1-9 | 3 pm |
| April 21 | Texas A&M, 1-9 | 6:30 pm |
| April 22 | Texas A&M, 1-9 | 2 pm |
| April 24 | UW-Milwaukee (DH) | 4, 7 pm |
| April 25 | UW-Milwaukee | 2 pm |
| April 28 | Iowa State, 1-9 | 6:30 pm |
| April 29 | Iowa State, 1-9 | 2 pm |
| April 30 | Iowa State, 1-9 | 1 pm |
| May 9 | Northern Iowa,1-9 | 6:30 pm |
| May 12 | Fresno State, 1-9 | 6:30 pm |
| May 13 | Fresno State, 1-9 | 2 pm |
| May 14 | Fresno State, 1-9 | 1 pm |

# Defending Champs



Playing small ball – like laying down the perfect bunt – may decide a close game or two.

## Nebraska takes speed, power, defense and pitching to the Big XII tourney with a repeat of '99 in mind

Photos by Eric Francis

If Nebraska is going to return to the Brickyard in Oklahoma City and repeat as champion of the Big XII baseball tournament, the Huskers know that beating teams like Texas and Baylor is a prerequisite.

So what makes a team that hovered near .500 in conference play for most of the season before fattening up on Missouri and Iowa State think it can win the post-season title? The same thing that made it think it could win the crown last season, and that is good enough for us.

As the Huskers stare down the barrel at another Big XII tournament with an NCAA regional invite the goal of winning or almost winning the thing, here are four keys to success for Coach Dave Van Horn and Nebraska.

Pitching depth has decided many a conference tournament.

**1. Finish Strong**

Starting with a three-game series at Texas, the regular season winds down in tough fashion for Nebraska. But therein lies the opportunity to play well against quality opposition, build confidence and head into the conference tourney with a full head of steam. If the Huskers collect one win in three games at Texas, it is a good trip. To steal a second win would be huge and to get all three would be titanic. Knock off Northern Iowa at home, finish a season sweep of Creighton at the Buck and then win at least two of three from Fresno State, also at home, and the Huskers will have to feel like they are at their best headed to Oklahoma City.

**2. Pitchers Step Up**

Winning college baseball conference tournaments is about having pitching depth. Sophomore Shane Komine has been brilliant and the rest of the Husker staff has been very good. But can a second and third guy step up like Chad Wiles and Scott Fries last year and will Komine be as strong in the tourney as in the regular season? Jamie Rodrigue could step up huge as a third starter for the Huskers in the post season and R.D. Spiehs is developing into a good college closer. Some staffs find another level of guttiness come tournament time, like Nebraska did last year, and some just blow up. NU needs a repeat of '99 from its pitchers.

The Huskers hope to pick off another league championship.

**3. Small Ball**

Nebraska has been lethal this year with a combination of power at the plate and great team speed. With a team batting average above .300 and slugging percentage near .450 for most of the season, the Huskers could have been successful playing station-to-station. But with one of the fastest lineups in the conference, Nebraska has been stealing over two bases per game. Come tournament time, though, it may be small ball that gives the Huskers a winning edge. Whether or not NU can put down a bunt, execute a hit-and-run or swipe a base at a critical time may be the difference in a one-run game. In Nebraska's four-game run through the tourney last spring, two of those victories came by a single run.

**4. On A Tear**

Who is going to be the one guy offensively that see beach balls and not aspirin against the Big XII's best pitching? When a hitter is on a tear, he either gets on base or hits the ball hard but right at somebody. It is an infectious type of performance that pulls other players along, giving them the confidence to step in against great pitching or to keep 'em working through a slump. Justin Cowan may be the man. The sophomore catcher had a 19-game hitting streak early in the season, but counting on a catcher to provide your offensive spark down the stretch can be dangerous. Job one for a backstop this time of year is to meticulously work with the pitchers and be a coach on the field. Brandt Vlieger and Will Bolt will be the Huskers who need to tear off a great tournament in Oklahoma City. v NSA

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YOUR LOCAL DODGE DEALERS PRESENT

cover story

# THE LAST PIECE OF THE PUZZLE

**Nebraska has a great offense and a tenacious defense, but one of the biggest factors toward a championship run may just be the unexpected return of sixth-year punter Dan Hadenfeldt**

BY KALANI SIMPSON

Dan Hadenfeldt is better than free money. He's no $20 bill found on the street to add a little sparkle to an otherwise dreary day. No, Hadenfeldt, back in Lincoln for his sixth year of football thanks to an NCAA ruling, would be as if Warren Buffett, already looking at having quite the financial season, thank you, discovered he were getting a refund from the IRS — of about a million dollars.

Well, that may be overstating it a bit for effect. (Or, who knows, in Buffett's case, perhaps understating it.) But one thing for sure — Nebraska's coaches aren't trading Hadenfeldt for a million dollars or anything else.

Because the senior punter may turn out to be a far more valuable bonus than money. He's something you can't buy.

He's the last piece of the puzzle.

What does this mean exactly? Well, as one fan posted on an internet site at the news of Hadenfeldt's return, "It's all starting to fall into place." That put it pretty well.

And another was even more succinct: "Excellent! Woo hoo!"

Nebraska's football team was set up for a big season in 2000, bigger even than their usual run of nine wins plus. The Huskers would be hands down favorites for the Big 12 crown, and more. The defense would have holes, but this was a reloading year, not a rebuilding one, led by Carlos Polk, Keyou Craver, Kyle Vanden Bosch and more. On offense, Nebraska is even more loaded. Eric Crouch, the dazzling playmaker, would hit the season in full stride. The best receiving corps in Nebraska's history was back, with names like Davison and Newcombe. The offensive line, led by All-American Dominic Raiola, just might be as good as 1994's "best ever" squad. And the running backs went six deep, with a mythical figure called Thunder joining up in the fall.

And on top of all that, Nebraska gets a bonus, a refund, a break of monumental proportions. On top of all that, it gets Hadenfeldt, perhaps making the team not just good, not just great, but complete.

In national championship runs, which

PHOTO BY ERIC FRANCIS

An NCAA ruling means Hadenfeldt is back to help Nebraska win the crucial battle for field position.

YOUR LOCAL DODGE DEALERS PRESENT

# cover story

Nebraskans have to be reminded don't come along every year, is this the last piece of the puzzle?

"It's certainly a huge piece," said Husker assistant Jeff Jamrog, who will coach the punt team.

It's huge because a great punter can be a weapon, and Hadenfeldt is the best ever to play at Nebraska, one who was instantly brilliant, and that was before he'd even had any game experience. He was a breath away from averaging 45 yards per punt last season, and that's with 26 punts inside the 20, along with eight touchbacks and six fair catches. In all, he stranded offenses at the 20 or inside 35 times, 14 times pinning opponents inside the 10, backs to the wall.

Inside the 10? Staring into the teeth of the Blackshirts?

"Defensively, when you can start a team off inside their own 10 it limits the number of plays they can run by a huge margin," Hadenfeldt explained. "With the speed we have on our defense, they're just hoping not to turn the ball over. We hope we can force them to be so conservative that they're just looking to punt the ball back to us, and then we've got it going in with great field position."

Do that a few times, and guess which team is likely to score more often.

Hadenfeldt had two punts inside the 10 in six games last season.

Ah, field position, sweet field position. Hadenfeldt has been a magician at placing punts, making the ball do his bidding while also keeping a booming average up. "Directional kicking is our goal every week," he said. Location, location, location. Dangerous returners, like Kansas State's David Allen can't do a thing if they can't get the ball, and Hadenfeldt can toy with them at will. Net yardage is the mantra, and at this the Huskers were 12th in the nation last season with Hadenfeldt at the foot of it all.

Even while giving the ball back to an opponent, punts became big plays with Hadenfeldt. Soaring efforts that land inside the five snatch the momentum back even only seconds after Nebraska had appeared to sputter. "It could be a big momentum swing," said special teams demon Randy Stella, who teamed with Hadenfeldt to pin a handful of punts on an opponent's doorstep. "That can pretty much set the crowd off."

And so even after what should be a triumphant defensive stand, 76,000 red-clad maniacs are right on top of you. And now here come the Blackshirts. All thanks to Hadenfeldt and his squadron of flying aces led by Stella.

That's why Hadenfeldt is such a bonus. Husker defense is tough, OK. Husker offense coming after you hard, fine. You can take that. But now this? On top of everything else? Thanks to Hadenfeldt, there is no break. You're always in the hole. You're always running uphill.

"The kicking game is huge," Jamrog said. "It's one third of the game."

The actual art of punting is moving the ball from the offense in a transition to playing defense. But the top punters actually change it from an act that is defensive by nature, to one that takes the offensive. Against California, Hadenfeldt boomed a 73-yard effort that went 83 yards in the air, nearly one end zone to the other. Against Missouri, his five punts were downed on the 20, 5, 5, 20 and 29-yard lines. Against Texas A&M he pinned two punts on the five, and the Aggies went nowhere. In a tough, down to the wire 24-17 win at Kansas, five of Hadenfeldt's seven kicks found their way inside the 20. Don't think that didn't help.

What having Hadenfeldt does, essentially, is severely reduces the other team's chances of being successful.

And in perhaps his finest hour, Nebraska pulled out a 33-30 overtime win at Colorado with Hadenfeldt backing up the Buffs with a 57.6 yard punting average. Now, that's a factor. Excellent! Woo hoo!

He'd had back surgery in 1995, and hadn't really recovered in 1996, and hey, it couldn't hurt to ask the NCAA if they'd cut him some slack and let him play another year. Kickers coach Dan Young broached the subject, and Hadenfeldt hadn't thought about it, but he liked the idea. He liked it a lot.

Hadenfeldt's season had been so good, he got invited to the NFL Combine, signaling that he was one of the top four or five pro propects in the nation. He thought about going pro, of course he did. He played in the Hula Bowl, because he figured he ought to cover his bases, and had a good week there in front of the scouts. Because of that one all-star game, the NCAA may or may not have him sit out the season opener to even things up.

But he would get to play again, for only his second season of college football. He jumped at the chance. "It's kind of like a bonus, with so many of my friends on the team from last year around again," he said. Oh, and on the field? Snapper John Garrison back. Stella back. The offense back. Great defenders back. The Huskers were loaded. And one of the top two or three punters in the country would be added, at the last second, a bonus. On the road to the BCS championship game, the Husker bus found another gear.

"We hope," Jamrog said, "it's one of the last pieces."

As for Hadenfeldt, he liked actually playing so much he's looking at his situation as more of a bonus for himself than for the team. He's more happy about it than anyone. He thinks.

This was extra. This was finding $20, only better, much better. "It's like, I've thought about if I could go back to high school football with what I know now," he said. "That's kind of how I feel now, that that's what I'm doing."

He smiled. An entire state smiled with him. v NSA

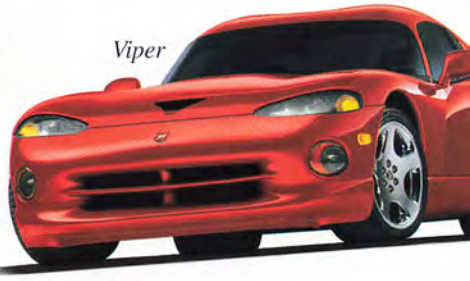
Caravan

Dakota

Avenger

Durango

Neon



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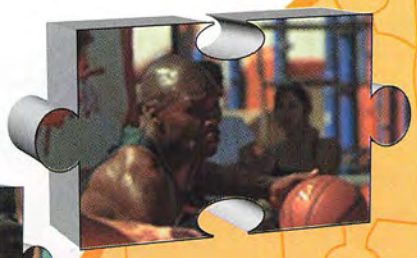

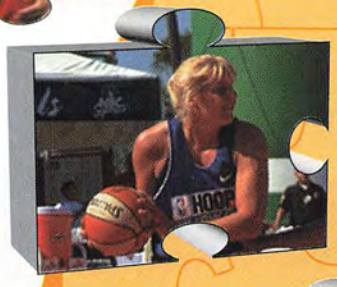

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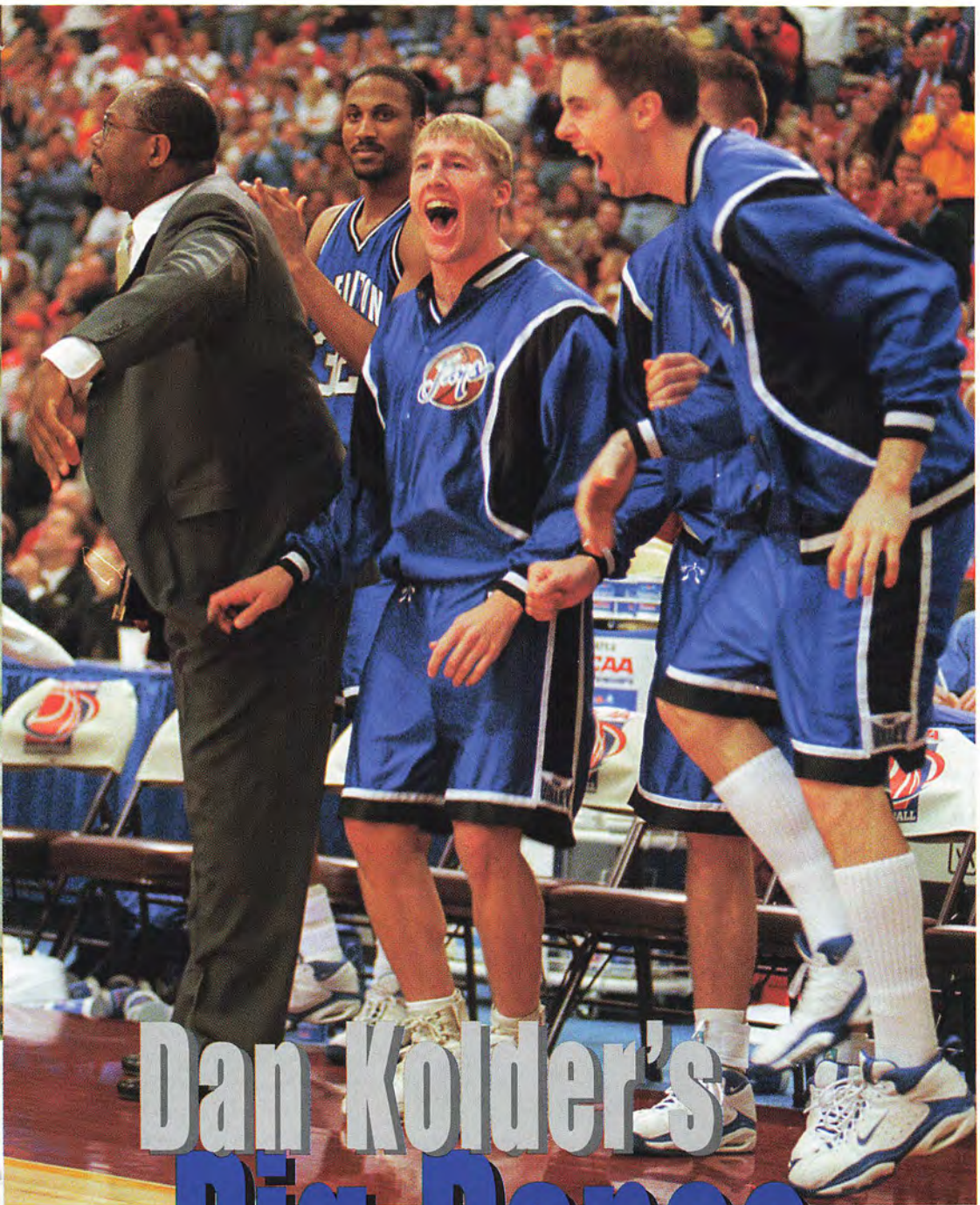

# Dan Kolder's Big Dance Diary

**By Dan Kolder**

**Photos By Jeremy Quigley**

Jays

**A player's inside account of Creighton's second straight trip to the Field of 64**

Coach Altman wasn't pleased. He was downright angry. He told us being down 15 points to Auburn University after the first 20 minutes in our NCAA Tournament game wasn't what he had in mind. He knew it wasn't what we had in mind either.

We could either fold or we could methodically cut the Tigers' lead in the second half. Down by only 12 points after five minutes. Then to eight. And so on.

He thought we had a chance to come back. And he was almost right.

If only Ben Walker hadn't been guarded by a 7-footer as he tried to make a last-second three to tie the game. If only we had fought harder in the first half.

With the loss, my basketball career at Creighton University ended. It's strange to think I'll have no more offseason conditioning. No more time spent in the airport waiting for flights to away games. No more hanging around with a great bunch of guys.

The memories remain, and this is my dairy of Creighton's trip to the NCAA Tournament. Our journey begin March 6 when we defeated Southwest Missouri State to win the Missouri Valley Conference Tournament title. No more being on the NCAA

Tournament bubble. We were in. Indiana State and Southwest Missouri State could worry about their fate.

Now, the work began. We didn't have much time to prepare for facing Auburn, the SEC Tournament runner-up.

This story picks up on Tuesday — two days before we faced Auburn.

TUESDAY

We practiced mid-day in Omaha, instead of flying to Minneapolis earlier. We could practice just as easily in Omaha, and then fly to

Minnesota. We focused on basic things — rebounding, boxing out. Coach told us these fundamentals would be key to our success.

Our plane left about 8 p.m., and we arrived at our hotel — the Downtown Embassy Suites — at about 10 p.m. Two representatives from the NCAA were at the airport to greet us. My roommate, Matt West, and I agree — the room at the Embassy Suites is sweet.

I realize my time on the Metrodome court likely will be limited. As point guard Ryan Sears' backup, I don't see much action unless we're way ahead or way behind. I do spell him each game to give him a breather. If it's a fairly tight game, I might see only several minutes of playing time.

I'm OK with my role. We need Ryan on the court. I want to help the team.

I'm beginning to realize my career at Creighton is about over. It's been a great four years. I never thought a kid from Columbus, Neb., would get the chance to go to the NCAAs, and now I'm doing it twice.

Tonight is an early night. Remember, we play at 11:30 a.m., so we have to get used to getting up early.

WEDNESDAY

Our paths crossed with the Auburn team at the Metrodome.

We were walking out, the Auburn players were walking in. No trash-talking. No one said anything.

The Tigers did leave an impression: They're big and athletic.

That encounter was later in the day.

We got up about 9 and had breakfast. Then, we watched film in Coach Altmanís room. It's more like a suite.

At noon, we practiced. For a baseball stadium, the Metrodome is impressive. The seats go way up.

During our 50-minute workout, we once again focused on our rebounding and boxing out. We also spent time shooting.

Back at the hotel, we killed time until about 5:45 p.m., when we went out for dinner. Then, we went to the Target Center. We shot free throws. It was exciting to be on the same court as the Timberwolves. We were hitting. We'll be ready tomorrow.

Afterward, we met again in coach's room to watch film and go over the scouting report. Coach isn't one to give big send-off speeches. He basically went over what we need to do to win.

No one needed to tell us to get a good night's sleep. Tomorrow will come soon enough.

THURSDAY

We were up at 7. After breakfast, we went to the Metrodome for an 8 a.m. shoot-around. Nothing strenuous. I didn't notice if the guys were hitting our shots. We've come to expect that we'll hit our shots. We're a great shooting team. Remember, we have six guys hitting 40 percent or better from three-point range.

Then, back to the hotel. We watched film again in Coach Altman's room. We know we need to come out hard.

Unfortunately, we came out flat.

I didn't get the sense that anyone was nervous before the game. We've played so many times this season. In many ways, this was just like another game.

Coach Altman didn't give us a flowery send-off speech. Out motto has been to "just swing away." This theme has carried over since our victory at the Missouri Valley Conference tourney in St. Louis.

Coach told us that as long as we play hard, he'll be proud. So will the people in Omaha.

Auburn, from the beginning, lulled us to sleep. We stood around too much on defense and gave them too many uncontested shots. Our switches weren't clean.

I entered the game at the 7:50 mark. Ryan needed a break. On defense, Ben Walker and I didn't get a clean switch. My man on the switch, Dameyon Fishback, hit a 3. That hurt a lot. I was in for one offensive possession, before Ryan returned.

After Coach Altman's half-time speech, we came out strong. We came right at them.

Auburn, however, did a nice job of stopping our runs with time-outs. That's good coaching.

Our comeback was exceptional. Then, we were down to seconds left. Our plan was to have four guys who could shoot the three on the perimeter. That would give us four options. Unfortunately, 7-foot Mamadou N'Diaye switched to Ben and blocked his shot.

After the game, we became emotional. We had spent so much time together — got to know each other.

Beginning with the Wichita State game, we had started forming a circle with all the players looking at one another. We formed that circle — with our arms around one another — one last time. The seniors did the talking. I want to keep what we said private.

We didn't leave the locker room until halftime of the Iowa State game. We went back to the hotel. Many of the players' families were there. I went out to dinner and the Mall of America with my parents and brother.

We left Minneapolis early the next morning. I went out to celebrate St. Patrick's Day later on and then returned home. The telephone rang, and Matt West and I were invited to play later that weekend in a tournament in Hastings.

I didn't hesitate. v NSA

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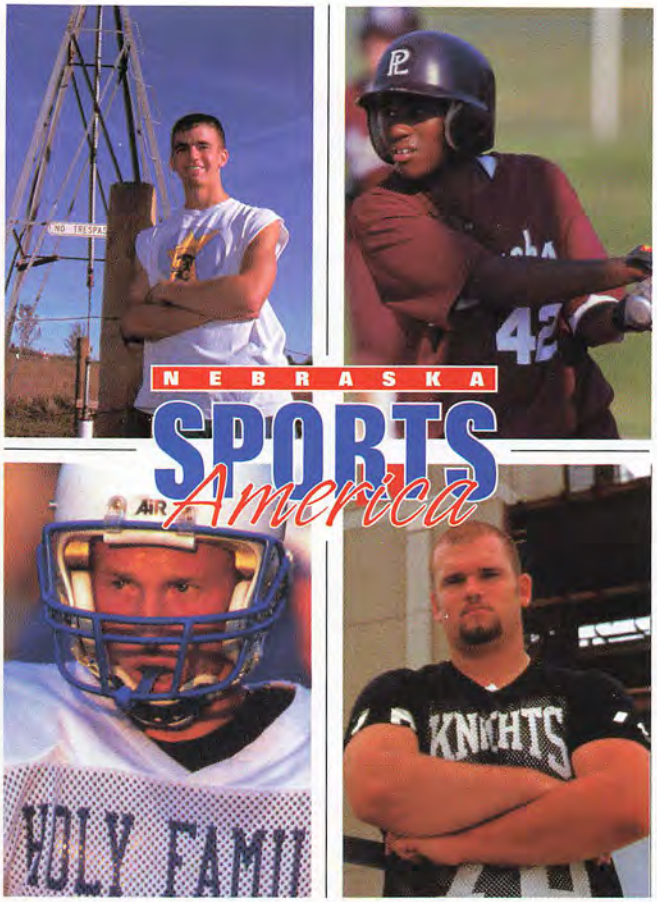


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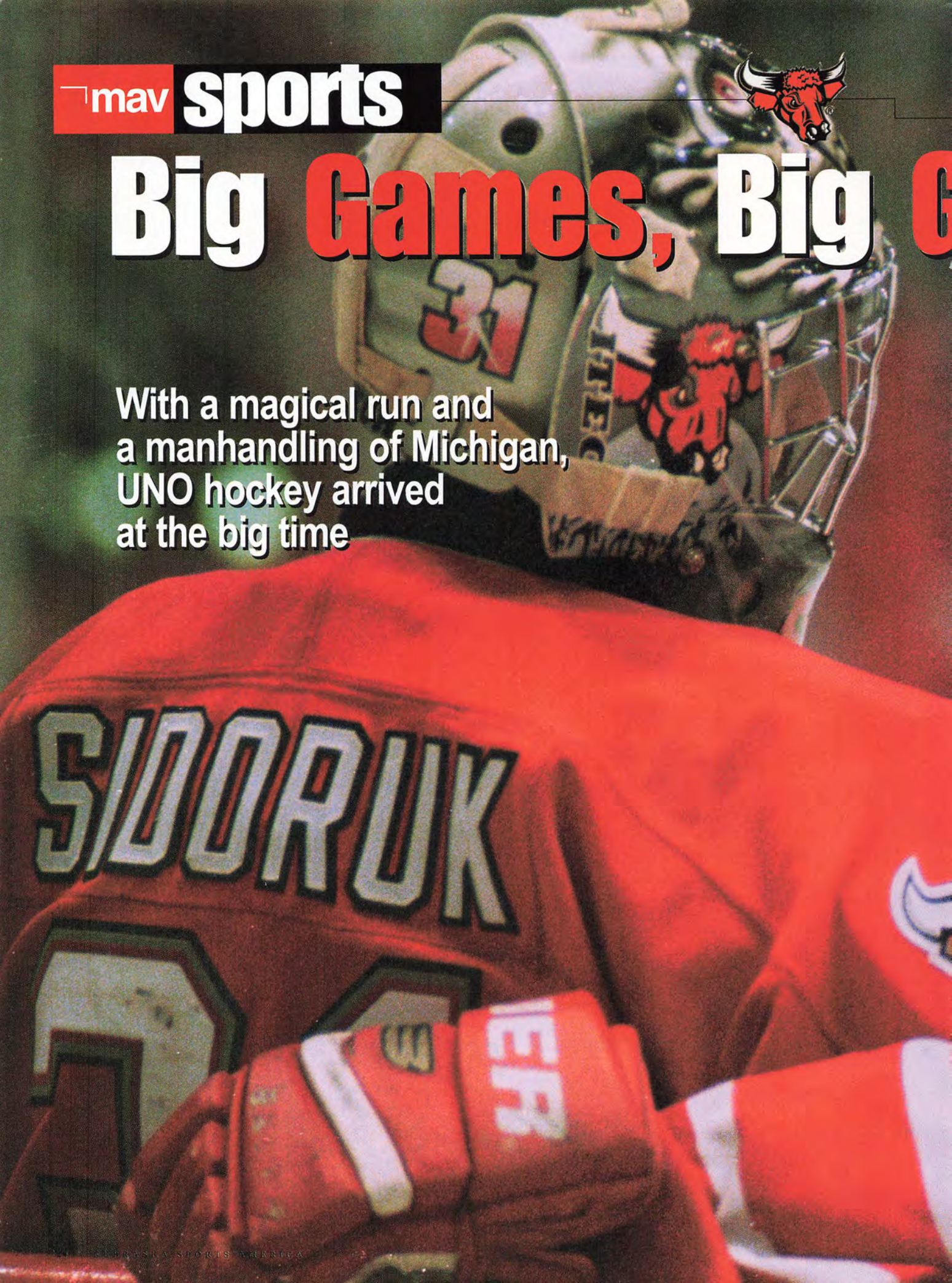
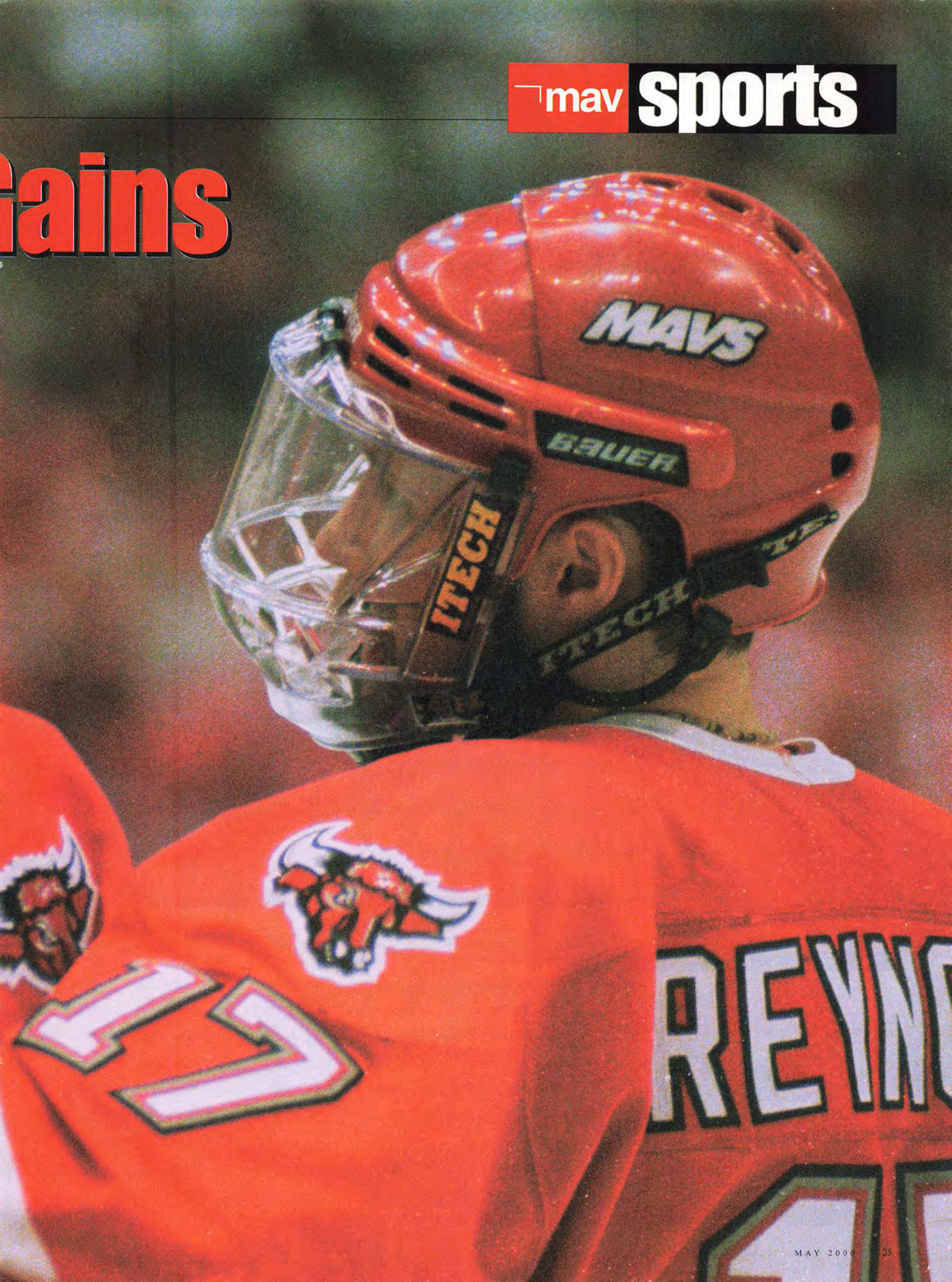
# Big Games, Big G

With a magical run and a manhandling of Michigan, UNO hockey arrived at the big time



# Gains



# The Night That

## UNO Hockey at the CCHA Final Four

The things that stood out were how brilliantly red the uniforms looked on TV and how much tougher the guys in red were than the guys in white. Crash! Boom! Bang! It was a John Cougar Mellencamp song out there.

The bar was full and business was booming and people were happy. UNO hockey was in the Final Four.

People cheered, and winced with each hit and grinned at each other over their chips and salsa. It was a good excuse to be out. It was fun.

And then, subtly, the mood changed. The Mavericks finished their checks harder and harder and then they scored, and then they scored again.

And the red looked even brighter.

It started to dawn on the people as they sipped their beers and stared wide-eyed at the big screen. They were going to win this thing! They were going to topple the might Michigan Wolverines, a top 10 team, in their backyard, in the Final Four, on TV, with the hockey world watching, oh my goodness, they were going to do it!

## With a magical play-in playoff performance by both fans and Mavericks,

# Dreams Came True

## UNO hockey advanced to the Final Four and, at that moment, stopped being merely a good idea and became an Omaha institution

**By Kalani Simpson**

Mike Skogland held him out a little longer. As the rest of the Maverick hockey team was heading for the locker room, high fiving kids on their way in, sunning themselves in the thunderous applause, Skogland kept Kendall Sidoruk in a bear hug to ensure that the goalie would be the last man to leave the ice. El Sid beamed, bearded and sweaty and teary eyed, and raised his helmet to the sky in triumph. It had only been three days ago that he had been shelled — pulled! — at Northern Michigan, but that was long forgotten. They had done it, taking two games from that first series, and now this. The last thing Sid saw, before he ducked his head to follow his teammates into the throng of the tunnel, was a standing ovation from 8,314.

"That's what we'd heard when we first got him, was that he was supposed to be a playoff goaltender," UNO hockey coach Mike Kemp said of Sidoruk. "This is the first year we've got to test out that theory."

It was the first year for a lot of things, and indeed, it proved true. Minutes later, they were back, skating onto the ice for an encore, for more hugs and more cheers. The crowd rained love down upon them from the rafters, and they let it wash over them, these Miracle Mavericks. They had done it. Somehow, they had broken a desperate tie and pulled out a 3-1 win over Bowling Green in the CCHA's playoff play-in game, and they were headed for Detroit, for Joe Louis Arena, for the Final Four. They had done it. They reveled in it, soaked it in. The night belonged to them.

Michigan loomed ahead in Hockeytown, USA, only three days away, five games in eight days, but none of that mattered this night. This was the moment when UNO hockey went from being an idea, a dream, an abstract, to something real. They chanted, the crowd, as they filed out, slowly, giddily, as if they really didn't want to leave. U-N-O! U-N-O! They chanted as they bustled around the locker room, jostled amicably around the fences, hoping for another glimpse at their heroes. Chanted and carried on the way they do streaming out of Memorial Stadium in Lincoln after a big football game. UNO? Who would have thought that those initials could hold so much passion for so many. Nebraska is a Husker state, first, foremost and only. But this was the lure of hockey and the magic of these men from up north and the dream that became reality on this night. In the hearts and minds of Omaha, UNO hockey had arrived. Perhaps that was the biggest miracle of all.

Kemp had been an assistant coach at national power Wisconsin for 14 years, in hockey for a lifetime, and had never seen anything like the atmosphere that night. "This was better than anyplace I've been," he said. Even Wisconsin? he was asked after the game. "Better than anyplace I can think of."

UNO needed it, needed every bit of it. They were tired, injured, broken down, banging their heads up against a brick wall of a goalie named Tyler Masters. But it was one and done, Final Four or finality, a dream scenario, and the crowd loved it. There would be no fatigue by the Mavericks now, no injuries, no giving up. "I think the crowd lifted us," Sidoruk said. "The adrenaline you get from that crowd is amazing."

Jeff Hoggan, the eventual hero, agreed. "You might be tired and having a little pain out there," he said. "But when the crowd gets behind you, you feel great."

Good Lord, it was loud. Public address man Fred Brooks was wasting his breath for much of the actual game because often, you simply could not hear him. After Hoggan tied the game with UNO's first goal of the night, a hard swipe through from feet away on a 5-on-3 power play, fans went wild, waving towels in helicopter fashion, creating an actual honest to goodness BREEZE in the Civic Auditorium, for crying out loud.

The crowd was good for a goal, perhaps literally. Seconds into the third period, Brooks having admonished the fans to create a wall of noise for the first two minutes at least, Bowling Green unceremoniously lit the lamp. Sidoruk stopped a shot, appeared to have taken possession of the rebound, but somehow the puck squirted through. A momentum killer. A Maverick killer.

But the officials weren't sure. They hesitated. At first hoping to buoy their Mavericks, but then,

sensing an opening, the crowd pounced.

U-N-O! U-N-O!

More delay. More review. More hemming and hawing. More Civic Auditorium adrenaline.

The crowd chanted. The seventh man had announced its presence, the elephant in the officials' living room.

Finally, referee Brent Rutherford had a decision. No goal.

It was waved off!

The celebration was relief, quieter, more smiles than screams. You could actually hear the music over the loudspeakers this time.

Everybody have fun tonight.

Everybody Wang Chung tonight.

But it would take more than a home ice advantage. This was a heavyweight fight. The Mavericks wouldn't let anyone get near Sid ("probably the best defensive game we've ever played," the goalie said). And UNO was outshooting the Falcons about a zillion-to-one. But in the other net was Masters, who seemed to grow bigger and more intimidating with each second.

He would not crack. That was clear. Tyler Masters was having a game that he would sit by the fire in Alberta and tell his grandchildren about. "He single handedly beat Lake Superior," Sidoruk said. He looked like he was doing the same to UNO. He was casual, unbeatable, easy; everything hit him square in the chest, right where he wanted it to. "That's when you know a goalie is on," Sid explained.

The Mavericks kept attacking, and Masters simply shrugged them off. He was unconscious, out of his mind, and the clock kept ticking. "Oh God," Hoggan started to think, "when are we going to get it?" He wasn't alone. Sidoruk, after all, tough as he proved to be, was still human. Masters wasn't.

It became more and more apparent. Masters was not going to break. Only one thing could get past him this night. "Garbage," said UNO captain Jeff Edwards. In other words, luck. It would take a miracle to beat him.

(Cue miracle music.) This was the night dreams came true, remember. And it would have to be Hoggan, who had two game-winners against Northern Michigan to help the Mavericks get this far, who had an eerily similar late miracle goal early in the season to help the Mavericks tie Notre Dame, who is playing with a torn ACL in his knee. "The guy has been coming up big in the clutch time and time again," Kemp said. ... "To come back and

produce the way he has defies description.

"It's an absolute show of courage."

It was an absolute show of luck, of magic, of willing the bounces to go your way. Playing dump and chase, defenseman Ed Cassin sent the puck into Bowling Green's zone. "We got a lucky bounce off their D-man's stick," Hoggan explained. It dribbled past the Falcon and behind the defense. And there was Hoggan, chugging at full speed out of nowhere, to clean up with a one-on-one against a stunned Masters, who had he not been on skates would have been caught flat footed. Hoggan swiped at it, a sharp angle, off stick, off pads and over the line.

"We got a lucky goal there," Hoggan said. "Big goal."

Garbage. Glorious.

"The crowd was absolutely stirring," Kemp said.

Four minutes, 15 seconds to the Final Four. Now, all the Mavericks had to do was fight and claw and scratch and work. That, they can do. Jason Cupp picked up a Falcon with his stick and slammed him to the ground. Jason White, Whitey, skidded to the ice to stop a puck with a body block, and the crowd roared its approval. A rugby scrum in the crease. Still, the Mavericks held.

Finally, Masters was pulled. And when Dave Brisson found the puck all alone (thanks to a high stick no-call) he slowly, surely skated all the way to the crease before depositing the empty netter, almost lovingly tapping it in. Up in the press box, UNO assistant coaches exploded in hugs. The game was over. The dream had come true. On to Detroit, and the Final Four.

The night belonged to them.

Did any of them really think that any of this would happen? "Well," Kemp said. "You always believe. And you know me ... I always believe."

Now, Omaha does as well. v NSA

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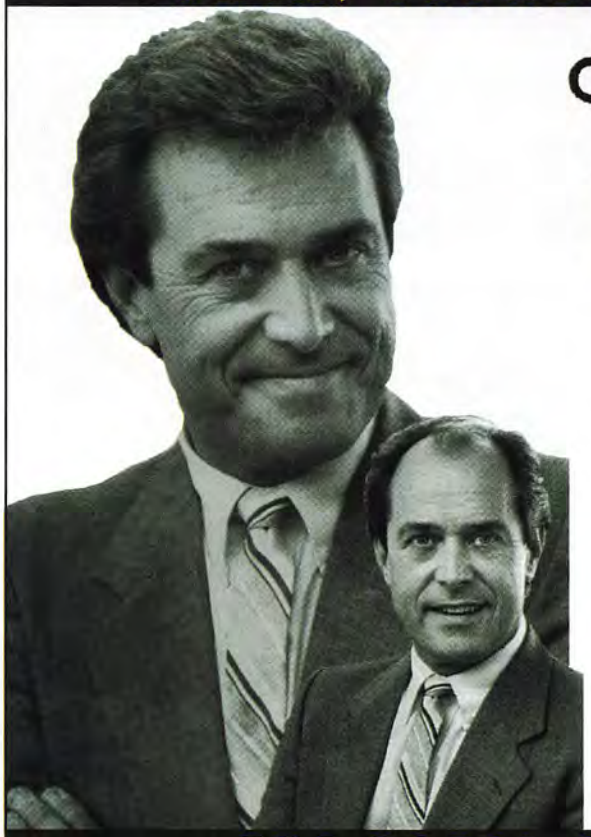

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# Where's the BEEF?

## Will Nebraska's new indoor football franchise catch hold in Omaha? After the first game, most signs point to yes

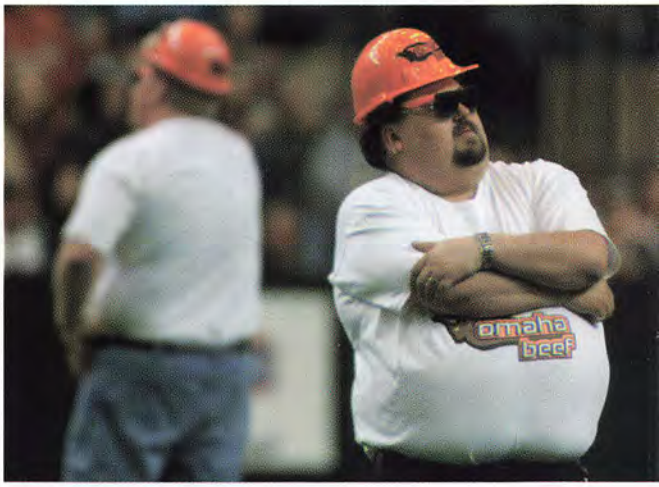
Photos By Eric Francis
By Kalani Simpson

The first play from scrimmage in Omaha Beef history was a touchdown, and that was nice. But that was nothing compared to what would come later in the game. Omaha native Abe Hoskins grabbed a pass from fellow Omaha native Troy Travis and took off running. Problem was, in making a cut and mostly eluding a defender, Hoskins had left his helmet behind, in the defender's grasp. Hoskins, newly bareheaded, paused in mid-juke, as if to ask himself what Casey Stengel would do in this situation. He decided to keep on trucking. And the crowd of 8,094 that had packed the Civic Auditorium for the debut of indoor football, well, they thought that this was pretty cool.

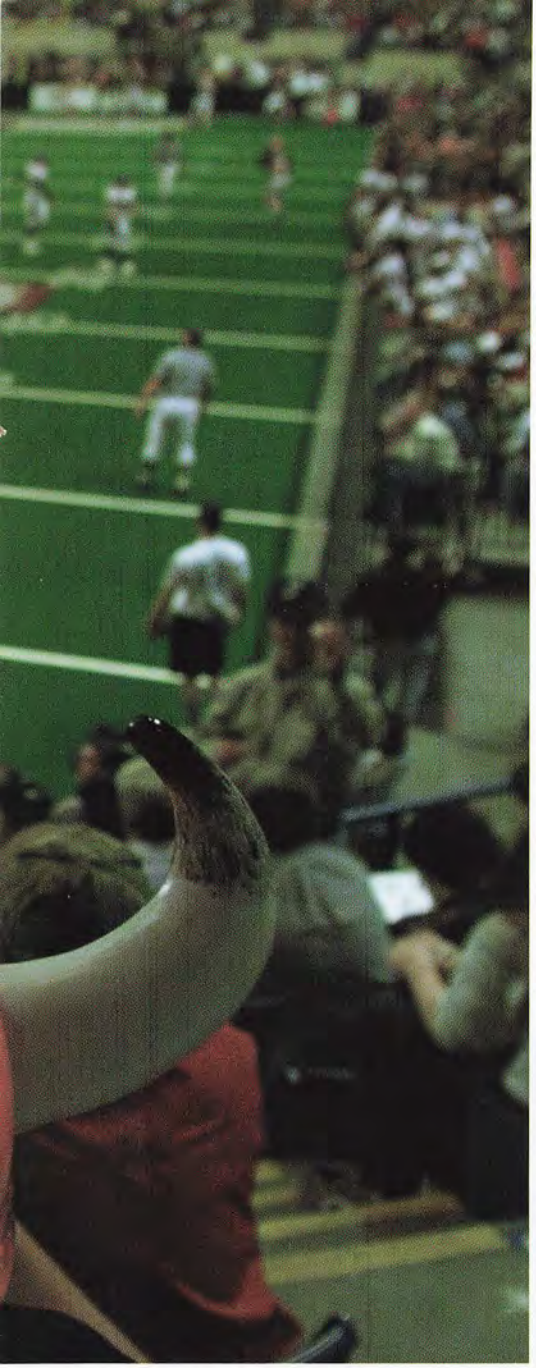
"I was trying to get to the end zone," Hoskins explained amid well-wishers and autograph seekers after the game. "I was just shocked after I seen they took my helmet off. I just didn't want to get hit in the head."

And who among us couldn't identify with that?

Yes, it looks like indoor (an even more minor league cousin of arena, only we can't call it "Arena") football will succeed in Omaha. It was a true full house on opening night, with none of the (ahem) empty seats seen during UNO hockey games at the Civic. The crowd seemed reasonably entertained, if not overjoyed, and the publicity pumped in my local media outlets will ensure that people will continue to come.




Yes, that's another secret to the potential success of indoor football in Omaha: Tacos. The press room at the Civic was set up first class, with mouth watering catered fare, bottles of soda and even (gulp!) beer. The beer was left untouched, nobody wanting to be the guy who



drinks on the job, but the attending media got the not so subtle message. Indoor football may be minor league, but in Omaha, this was going to be a big deal.

Every TV station in town carried coverage of the first game, most going live, and the next morning the Omaha World-Herald splashed it across the front page of the sports section as if it were a Husker football Sunday. ." The next day, the World-Herald followed up, having assigned sports features ace Colleen Kenney to a day in the life of a double duty working (at $200 a game, they keep their day or night jobs) Beef player. Sunday night, Channel 6 gave Coach Sandy Buda a scaled down version of his own television show with a live appearance and highlights on Ross Jernstrom's "Sunday Sports Extra." With the media's continued blessing, the Beef should do just fine.

On the field, it's too early to tell at this writing. A guess: the Lincoln Lightning (second year program, and inexplicably in different indoor leagues) would handle the expansion Omaha team.

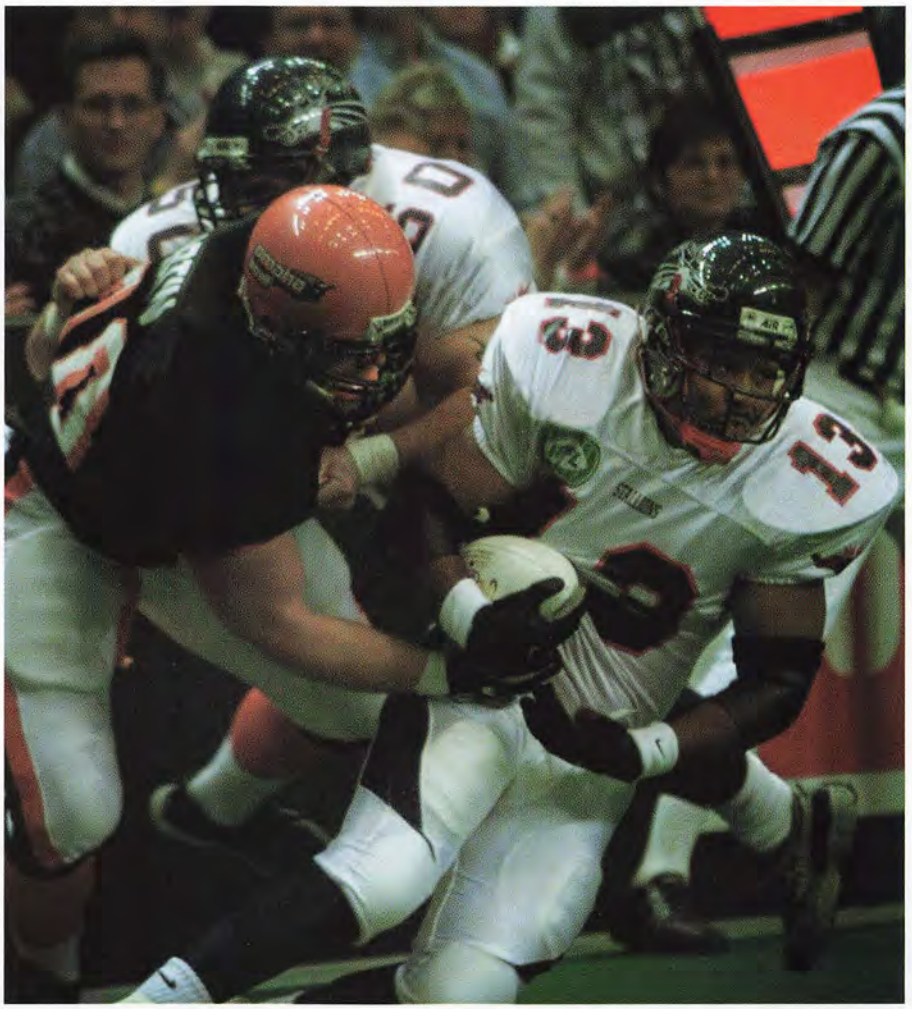
How good is this league? Omaha has good, solid but not spectacular talent. All good football players, but the next Kurt Warner probably isn't in the bunch. The Idaho Stallions, the opponent on opening night, to be kind, were horrible. Former NFL pros, however, are on other teams. Will the Beef stack up? By now, readers will have a much better idea. A few of the guys, like Hoskins and Travis and former Husker Clinton Childs, and Air Force Academy grads Shannon Yates and former All-WAC linebacker Johnny Harrison, have played Division I. Most of the players, like former All-American Bob Wegner, have some sort of UNO connection. One of the Beef's best players was Stephen Lovell, a defensive back/kick returner who attended Graceland College, which has an NAIA program, and not exactly a powerhouse one at that.

After the game, Lovell, who was in on several plays and returned a kick for a touchdown, was asked if he thought he would ever play football again. "I prayed about it," he said. "I wanted

to keep playing. I didn't want to stop playing."

That's the kind of player the Beef has. Nobody who's going to the NFL. Just hard working, good players with football in their blood. The ones who pause at night and say, Lord, just want to wear that helmet and pads again. Please.

That's the kind of desire, no matter what the level of play, that makes football fun. Fun for the players, fun for the fans, fun for the coaches. And even fun for the taco scarfing media. v NSA



# Still on the Run

By Kevin Warneke

**Though he occasionally entertains hopes about the NFL, Damon Benning has settled into the real world quite nicely — with a little sideline as league MVP for the indoor Lincoln Lightning**

When Jay Noddle looks at Damon Benning, he doesn't see a former Husker football player with aspirations of playing in the NFL.

Noddle, president of Pacific Realty, sees something else.

He sees a polite, disciplined young man who has an outstanding work ethic. He sees a likable, well-organized man who, in many ways, is mature beyond his years.

"Put yourself in a room with 10 26-year-olds," Noddle said, "and Damon is going to stick out."

Noddle thinks so highly of Benning, he asked him to run Pacific Pals, a nonprofit organization that helps kids be kids. "He cares an awful lot about kids," Noddle said.

Benning, a Husker running back from 1993 to 1996 and team captain as a senior, figures he has the best of two worlds.

He'd like to play professional football — the NFL brand. He believes he has the skills and thinks he's playing at his best. A local sportswriter, who's watched him play the past seven years, told Benning he's never seen him move so well.

Still, Benning knows his biological clock is ticking. He's 26 years old and, in NFL years, that's closing in on middle age.

"I'm not overwhelmed or consumed by getting back to the NFL. Everything has a time or a place. I take things as they come," he said. "I don't wake up in the morning and think I've got to get to the NFL."

Instead, he said, he focuses on bettering himself on the football field and in the corporate world.

By day, his work for Pacific Pals has him providing opportunities for area youngsters they might miss. At night, he's the reigning

offensive player of the year in the Indoor Football League and star running back for the Lincoln Lightning.

"He's head and shoulders above any running back in this league," said Lightning Coach Jose Jefferson. "He belongs in the NFL."

True, the IFL is not the NFL. It's not even the AFL — or Arena Football League, the version that gave us Super Bowl MVP Kurt Warner.

But it is professional football and Benning is good. His quickness and soft hands make him perfectly suited for this level of play. Last season, he rushed for 963 yards and 34 touchdowns. He caught 24 passes for 185 yards and another five touchdowns.

Benning knows indoor football has its skeptics. Try it, he said. "I don't know if there's a faster, more violent game than the arena game."

Although indoor football came to Omaha this season in the form of the Beef, Benning decided to stay put, partially out of loyalty to his coach and team. "I was part of a building process last year," he said. "I didn't want to go through that again."

So he's back with the Lightning while his new agent shops his talent to the NFL. Some clubs have expressed interest — and another stellar season with the Lightning certainly won't hurt.

But Benning, who suffered an early season tear of his groin muscle, is not keeping his bags packed in case his telephone rings. He's too busy gathering support — financially and otherwise — for Pacific Pals.

He's also thankful for the opportunity. That thanks goes to Noddle, whom Benning said he met during his first year at Nebraska.

Former Coach Tom Osborne introduced the two, which led to Benning serving as a summer camp counselor in Lincoln for Noddle's program. Benning, who spent two summers with the program, enjoyed the experience, which involved working with at-risk youth.

After graduation and a brief tryout with the Carolina Panthers, Benning worked as an account manager for a telecommunications company.

The job was good, but it wasn't exactly what he wanted. "The money was all fine and good, but I wasn't really happy. I wanted to work with kids."

While Benning was beginning to explore his options, he asked Noddle for some professional advice. In the end, Noddle gave Benning more than words of wisdom.

The two met for lunch, during which Benning explained his professional aspirations and his opportunities. Noddle promised to get back to Benning. Two weeks passed. "I thought he forgot about me. He's a busy guy."

Not so. Noddle returned with an offer Benning didn't refuse. He asked Benning if he wanted to run the Pacific Pals program. "I told him I needed to think about it," Benning recalled. "Two minutes later, I said sure."

Noddle encouraged the Northwest High School graduate to think the offer over and check out the program. The more Benning did, the more he liked the possibility. More than 33,000 children had participated in the program since its start in 1992; the program was affiliated with more than 75 community organization.

The program provides youngsters with new experiences. For example, an after-school art program with the Bemis center allows participants to work on projects twice a week. The summer camps continue in Omaha and Lincoln, with athletes from various sports serving as counselors.

Benning acknowledges that being a former Husker football player doesn't hurt when he's searching for financial support or building community coalitions. At first, Benning said, he felt uncomfortable using his Husker status to his advantage. He doesn't wear the national championships rings — that might be pushing it. He does, however, have a print in his office of the Huskers' 1995 victory over Miami.

Benning said Noddle is supportive of him chasing his dream. Still, he said, his boss knows where Benning's priorities lie. "He knows first and foremost, my job comes first."

There's still that unanswered question: Does he have the game to get him to Indianapolis, Seattle or someplace else in the NFL?

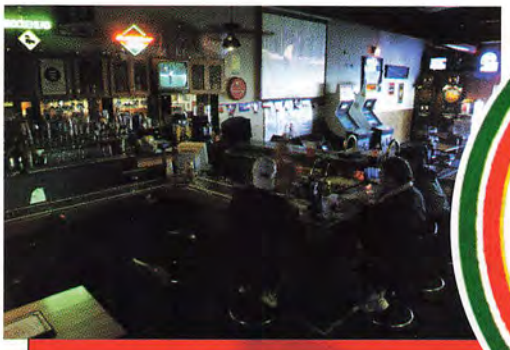
He could have attended the Toronto Argonauts' training camp. That's the CFL. He's had inquiries, invitations to work out for NFL teams, but no guarantees.

It took three to bring Benning to the turf this time.

"Until someone says we want to bring you to camp, then I'll listen."

Benning said he's thought about the time when his football days are over. That time could come at the end of this season — even if it means closing the door on his hopes to play in the NFL.

"I realize it may never happen — and I'm OK with that." v NSA



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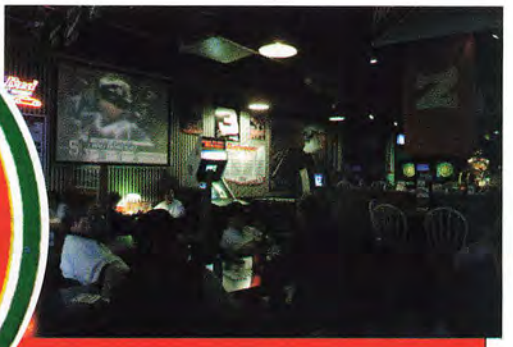

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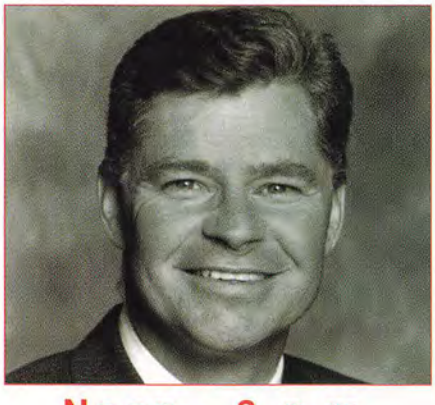

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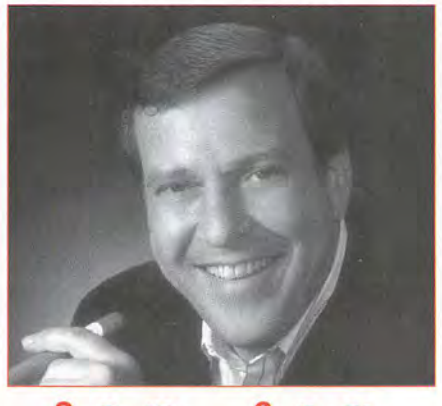

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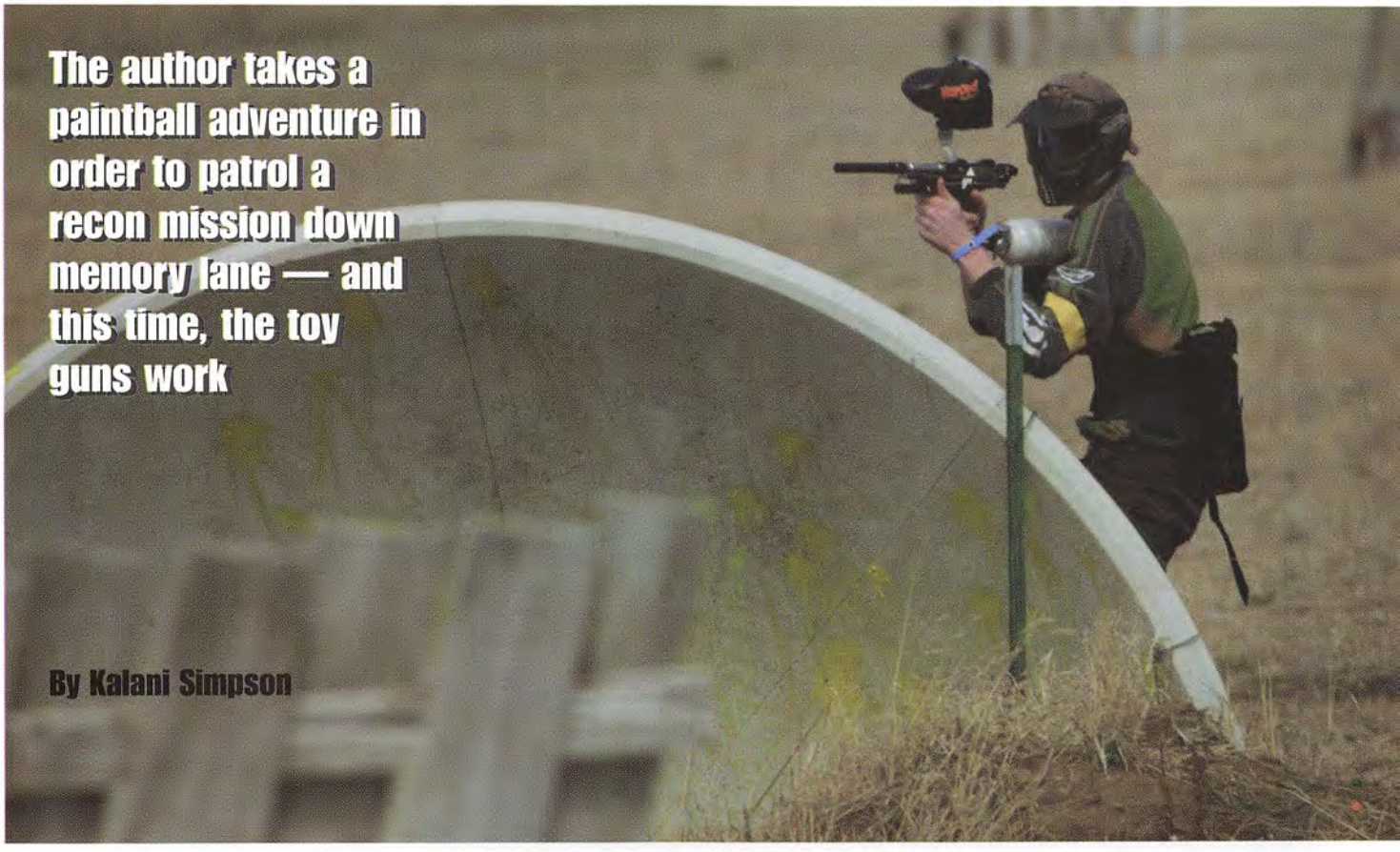

**The author takes a paintball adventure in order to patrol a recon mission down memory lane — and this time, the toy guns work**

**By Kalani Simpson**

# Boys *among* Men

It happened lying uncomfortably hunched over in mud, breathing through an ill-fitting gas mask-type helmet, with projectiles audibly whizzing mere inches past my head at speeds approaching 6 zillion miles per hour.

That's when I realized it.

I LIKE paintball.

No, really. I REALLY like paintball.

And then I popped my head up again, from behind the stump where I had been hiding hopelessly pinned down under fierce enemy fire, rifle at the ready, just like in the movies. Cool, muddy moisture soaking its way up to my knees, I spotted another head peeking out in the distance, aimed, and fired. Splat! A direct hit! A giant splotch covered what had once been my target's protective goggles, leaving a beautiful, ravishing piece of yellow modern art in its place. It was the most gorgeous sight I had ever seen, the epitome of triumph. I howled with excitement, adrenaline coursing through my entire body, and dove back into the mud, cackling as return fire sizzled over my head and splattered off the trees above. Yes! YES!

"I got him!" I said to another guy lying serpentine in the muddy forest, to the left of me. I got him.

Let's change that to love.

I LOVE paintball.

Of course, in my one day of commando training, that was the single and only game in which I had hit anybody (three, in fact, though my poor goggles target had later wiped himself off when he got back to base, and obviously embarrassed at having been hit between the eyes, refused to admit his identity). But it was enough. The sight of nailing that guy right in the face might have been, and I don't think I'm overstating this here, the biggest accomplishment of my life.

It was as if every childhood adventure had returned, only this time, the guns worked. There would be no more arguments over who was hit and who was not this day.

Pow! Pow! I got you!

No you didn't!

Pretty tough contention there, Splotch-face.

And boy, did the guns work. Powerful, semi-automatic, pop! pop! pop! As Meg Ryan says in the movie "Armed and Dangerous" (starring John Candy and Eugene Levy in their most memorable roles): "Remember, when you pull the trigger, the bullets come out VERY FAST."

Just ask Splotch-boy.

Of course, I wasn't sure that I would like paintball. For one thing, from the outside it

looks like it has kind of a golf culture to it, with the clothes, the equipment, the courses. And so many rules: "No faking of injuries"; "No obscene gestures"; and "Do not use the woods as a rest room." I mean, come ON!

Just take away my entire game plan, why don't you?

And then there's the release we signed: "... The risk of injury from the activity and weaponry involved in paintball is SIGNIFICANT, including the potential for PERMANENT DISABILITY and DEATH ..." So I'm going out in the woods with a bunch of guys for whom incidental risk isn't quite good enough. No, we want our risk to be SIGNIFICANT. Where do I sign?

But it's great. Running through the woods, playing soldier, ducking behind trees, jumping over creeks, dodging bullets. Dodging bullets! These things go VERY FAST, specifically up to 290 feet per second, Splotch-boy, in case you were wondering. This is every little boy's dream come true. It's like every war movie ever made, and now that we're old enough to be sensitive to the real life horror of these things, without the blood and killing and death (well, mostly — the release form says there is always a chance, remember).

And, well, despite my bulls eye, I wasn't all that good in it. I got hit a lot, and luckily, the paint washed out of everything pretty good, including my scalp. (And you thought that dandruff was embarrassing.)

Does it hurt? Well, it stings. Specifically, it stings your ego. There's nothing worse than having to actually admit you've been hit (which is why we lived in such denial as kids) and trudge back to the base and wait for the next game to start, swapping lies with all the other dead guys while everyone else gets to keep playing. I did a lot of trudging and waiting, all the while the group of us telling each other how good we had been doing right up until that "lucky shot" caught up with us.

They have little cages for one-on-one or two-on-two grudge matches, but that's not my style. And there was also a wide-open field with towers and barricades to hide behind, which was pretty cool. But my favorite was out in the woods, with the trees and the creek and the gulches and the mud. The kind of place you had fantasy army adventures in as a kid.

And that's what paintball is, if only once a year, if only for a few hours — a time machine for boys who have unfortunately grown up. v NSA

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# BIKE MASTERS

Let me introduce you to Bike Masters Cycling & Fitness. On the right is owner Dan Hill and to the left is (me) owner Kendra Hill. And that little guy in the middle is Adam and he is the real boss.

Doesn't it seem that the youngsters in our lives rule the many decisions we make? They influence what groceries we buy, which vacations we take and which multi-speed, shock-absorbent, metallic red, "but all my friends have one" bicycle is taken home.

With all of these purchases we try to make sure we are getting the best buy for our dollar as well as the products that are best for our children. When shopping for a bicycle for your child, or yourself, we at Bike Masters Cycling & Fitness will help make sure you are getting the bike that meets your needs.

Service is the cornerstone of our business and when you come in we will listen to you. Most importantly, we will do our best to use the information you give us to find the product that meets your needs. As a service to you now, we would like to impart some general guidelines when shopping for a bicycle for your child.

* Safety should be the most important guideline for buying a bicycle. Look for a competent sales person that can fit a bicycle for your child correctly. The handlebars and seat are just two items that you should make sure are properly fitted. All Bike Masters Cycling & Fitness staff are trained in how to fit a bicycle properly.

* Before leaving a store with your bicycle purchase, be sure the sales staff has checked the bicycle for proper assembly and has verified that it is in proper working condition. The staff should also review with you how to maintain the bicycle. Specifically that should include, but not be limited to, what the correct air pressure is for the tires and how to keep the chain lubricated.

* No bicycle purchase is complete without the proper safety accessories. All bicycles should have reflectors and be outfitted with a light if the bicycle will be ridden at night. All riders should be fitted with an appropriate helmet, which is one of the most important safety accessories a rider should own.

Many of these guidelines apply to the adult shopping for a bike as well. At Bike Masters Cycling & Fitness we strive to meet the needs of all types of cyclists- child to adult, roadie to recreationist, novice to expert.

Not only will we help find the right bicycle for you, we also provide full service and repair on all types of bikes. We have fully-trained and courteous service technicians that would be glad to help diagnose the "clunk-ping" sound coming from your rear wheel or install that new shock you have been wanting.

So come visit us at Bike Masters Cycling & Fitness. Dan and I would like to introduce you to the rest of the family at our shop, however don't expect to see Adam. He will probably be off playing with a friend and discovering a fancy new toy that will become our next major purchase.

Look for next month's article on guidelines for purchasing fitness equipment.

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# A Decade Later These Jays Look Familiar

Jack Dahm, Creighton's youthful and exuberant baseball coach, isn't a great believer in omens, signs (well, except for baseball signs, of course), prophecies or tea-leaf readings. He is, however, a firm believer in the theory that history will inevitably repeat itself.

That, as much as anything, explains why Dahm sat his Bluejay team down prior to the season and began handing out copies of faded newspaper clippings from 1991. Bluejay baseball fans remember it, of course. It was a very good year.

In 1991, the Bluejays behind Coach Jim Hendry (Dahm was a wide-eyed young assistant coach then) shocked the collegiate baseball world by earning a berth in the College World Series. The Jays finished 2-2 at the CWS, failing to advance, but gained legions of admirers and earned national respect.

"Most of the guys on our team know the names on that 1991 team — Scott Stahoviak, Chad McConnell, Mike Heathcott and so on," Dahm said. "But as I told the team, 'Hey, before we got to the College World Series, even people in Omaha didn't know who most of these players were.' Creighton baseball was that anonymous.

"They just thought that those players were probably household names in Omaha. So I showed them the clippings from before the 1991 season and what people were expecting of Creighton baseball. And what they were expecting was not much."

Dahm was a wide-eyed assistant during the '91 dream season.

The same could be said about the 2000 Jays which, of course, was Dahm's point. The trick to winning when people don't expect you to, he said, is to have a clear, visible goal and never waver from attaining it.

In 2000, the Jays have set their sights on winning the Missouri Valley Conference championship, something Creighton — not even the 1991 team — has accomplished.

"Wichita State has won the Valley for 13 years in a row," Dahm said. "Heck, in 1991, Wichita State beat us eight times! We just decided before the season, as a team, that our goal was to win the Valley. Anything above and beyond that we will take as it comes."

In March, the Jays sent a message to the Shockers: Get used to it.

Creighton won three out of four against the Shockers in their first meeting of the season and displayed total dominance in doing it. The legendary 1991 Bluejays never came close to accomplishing that.

Dahm is not about to say that this Creighton team is destined to reach the College World Series. In fact, the Jays' coach said his team "has a very long way to go" before it reaches that caliber of play. But the same could be said about the 1991 team.

"I remember in the regional against Southern Cal, when McConnell hit that huge home run to give us the lead and it looked like we might win," Dahm said. "I looked at Hendry and he looked at me and his look said, 'Hey, we might actually pull this off ...' It was at that exact moment I knew we were going to Omaha."

In early April, this year's Creighton team was atop the Missouri Valley Conference standings with a school-record 22-4 start and the Jays were solidly ranked in the nation's top 25. More important, there were eerie signs that this Creighton team might also be one of destiny.

DÈj‡ vu all over again?

Dahm laughed at the question.

"Every season is different, every team is different," he said.

But this one looks vaguely familiar. "That 1991 team was a lot like our team now," Dahm said. "Nobody expected much from them except themselves. They set goals and went after them. This bunch does that too. We'll see, we'll see ..."

Indeed we will.

*Terry Henion is a longtime sportswriter who has worked for the Omaha World-Herald, Colorado Springs Gazette-Telegraph and the Hastings Tribune.*

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**VIEWPOINT**

## *Altman is as good as it gets*

Is there a better college basketball coach in the country than Creighton's Dana Altman?

It would be awfully hard to come up with one. There are dozens of extremely successful and very talented coaches at the Division I level alone, and coaches at lower levels of play overcome more obstacles on the road to success.

But no coach does it better than Altman. He has skippered Creighton back into the NCAA tournament for a second straight year and continued CU's steady improvement in the win column. Every year since Altman came to Creighton, the Jays have won more games. Monday's whipping of Southwest Missouri State in the Missouri Valley


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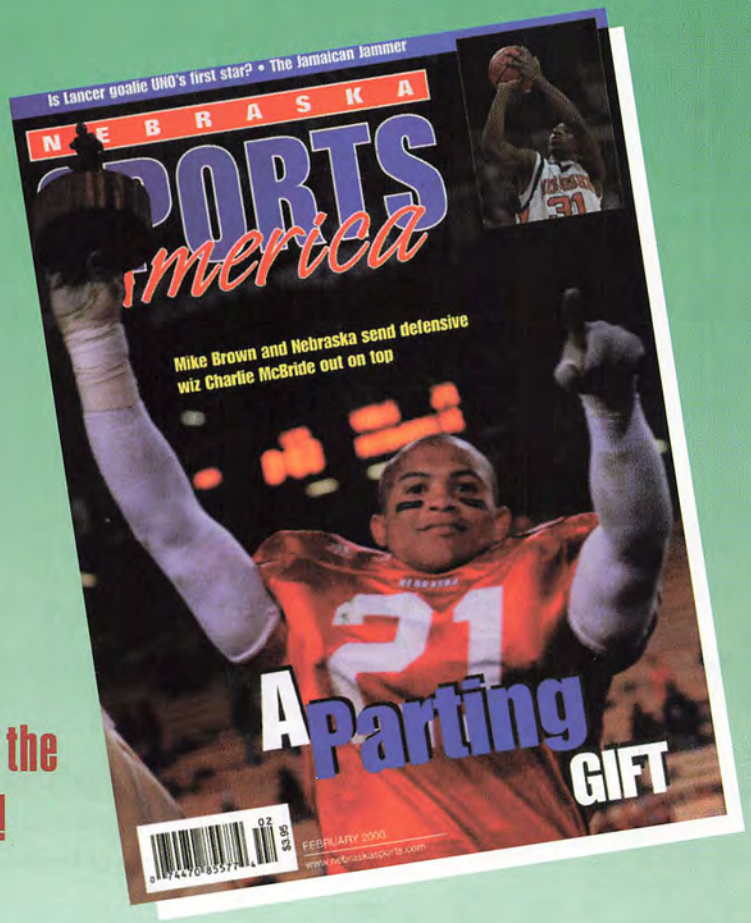
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